

## Young AU softball team poised to build on experience of record-breaking season

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ALFRED, NY Despite fielding only two seniors and one junior, the 2008 Alfred University softball team is, for all intents and purposes, a veteran squad. A starting lineup of eight freshmen, a junior and a sophomore enjoyed unprecedented success last year, earning a school single-season record 23 wins. After narrowly missing out on a berth to the Empire 8 Conference championship tournament, the Lady Saxons ended their year with a trip to the ECAC Upstate championships, where they fell in the title game to finish 23-16 (5-7 Empire 8). Third-year head coach Gino Olivieri is excited about his team's chances of building on last year's success. His optimism is due to the positive attitude his team showed after the disappointment of not making the four-team Empire 8 tournament, an attitude that carried over into the fall season and now, the spring. "Those kids (with the exception of junior catcher and tri-captain Nicole Messura (Albion, NY/Albion), senior first baseman/pitcher Amanda Hemenway (Redding, PA/Enterprise), and senior reserve utility player Satomi Tomizawa (Fukushima, Japan/Iwaki Sakuragaoka)) are all coming off their freshman years, but they're acting like juniors and seniors," Olivieri said. "They all played 35 to 40 games last year. They gained a lot of experience and now they've come back confident." The Lady Saxons will have some obstacles to overcome. Ilana Price, a Second Team all-star pitcher as a freshman, is lost from the team due to illness. While Price and her 1.97 ERA and school single-season record 18 wins from a year ago will be missed, there is a pair of hurlers ready to step in and fill the void. Sophomore Holly Seidewand (Webster, NY/Webster Thomas) will take over as the team's ace. She went only 3-8 with a 5.35 ERA last year but improved steadily with each start and ended her freshman campaign with a stellar performance at the ECAC tournament. A power pitcher who relied primarily on her fastball to strike batters out, Seidewand has worked hard to develop her curve and changeup. "She's worked tremendously on her control. She has a very good curveball and she's gotten much better at throwing her changeup for strikes," Olivieri said. Seidewand will play in left field when she's not on the mound. One of the team's best hitters, she batted .350 last year with 22 RBIs, 20 runs and an AU single-season record 43 hits (including a pair of homeruns and a team-leading 10 doubles). "She's a tremendous hitter," Olivieri said. When Seidewand isn't pitching, Hemenway will be called on to take the hill. Hemenway played primarily at first base last year, batting .333 with 20 RBIs. She did make three starts on the mound and went 1-3. Olivieri hopes she'll be able to recapture the form she enjoyed pitching two years at Tallahassee (FL) Community College (2005 and 2006) before transferring to AU before her junior year. "She is going to have to pick up a lot of the slack on the mound for us," Olivieri said. "She's always been a pitcher but she had a different role last year. She throws hard and has a curve and a change." Olivieri credits first-year pitching coach Shannon Fleishman with improvements Seidewand and Hemenway have shown since the beginning of the 2007-08 year. When she's not pitching, Olivieri said, Hemenway could see time as a designated hitter. She'll compete for time at first with sophomore Emma Walsh (Lancaster, NY/Mt. St. Mary), who was injured during the Lady Saxons' spring trip to Florida last year and couldn't crack the starting lineup, and freshman Ashley Passaro (Long Beach, NY/Long Beach), a slick fielding Long Island standout who earned Nassau County Player of the Year honors as a senior at Long Beach (NY) High in 2007. "Emma was starting at first last year but hurt her ankle. She plays a solid first base and has worked very hard on her hitting. She's developed into a good line drive hitter," Olivieri commented. Passaro "is a line drive, power hitter. And she makes it look easy over at first." The rest of the infield is set, as a trio of standout sophomores - third baseman Jesika LeBarron (Campbell, NY/Corning West), shortstop Karen Folts (Penn Yan, NY/Penn Yan), and second baseman Jordan Siefer (Sylvania, OH/Sylvania Southview) return. LeBarron hit .323 with a team-leading six homeruns and a .602 slugging percentage, and played solid defense all year long. "She's solid as a rock at third, with just a gun for an arm. And she's hitting the ball very well again this year," Olivieri said. Folts, a captain, and Siefer struggled in the field early in the year, with most of their errors coming during the 14-game trip to Florida. But, as Olivieri pointed out, each showed steady improvement throughout the year and were solid fielders by year's end. Their offensive contributions were never in doubt. Folts batted .313 with 41 hits (three homers) and a team-leading 26 RBIs (including a school single-game record six in a victory over Pitt-Bradford). Siefer, an honorable mention Empire 8 all-star in 2007, batted .282 with a pair of homeruns, scored a team-leading 29 runs and drove in 22 while stealing a team-best 14 bases in 16 attempts. "Jordan works very hard and can hit the ball well. She's a good contact hitter with some pop in her bat," Olivieri said. "Karen is very consistent at the plate. We want her coming up in a clutch situation. The ball really jumps off her bat." Messura will see the bulk of the time behind the plate. A starter each of her first two seasons, she showed significant improvement at the plate, batting .419 with nine RBIs, while

playing solid defense (.994 fielding percentage; nine of 14 runners thrown out attempting to steal). Sophomore centerfielder Jessica Figallo (Ridgewood, NJ/Ridgewood), a captain, will anchor the outfield. An Empire 8 Second Team all-star, Figallo hit .260 with 18 runs while playing outstanding defense. "She's a very good leader," Olivieri said of Figallo. "She's a solid hitter, great at making contact, with some power. She's smooth in center field." Also competing for time in the outfield will be sophomores Shannon Mather (Endicott, NY/Union-Endocott) and Lauren Peterson (Abington, MD/Harford Tech) and freshmen Brittany Loucks (Addison, NY/Addison) and Brianne Asterita (East Islip, NY/East Islip). Mather saw significant time in right field (hitting only .177 but driving in 17 runs) before she was slowed by a late-season shoulder injury. Peterson, who will back up Messura behind the plate, saw some time in 24 games at catcher and in the outfield and wound up hitting a team-best .429 with a pair of homeruns, 12 RBIs and a .738 slugging percentage. "Shannon had some injury problems last year, but she has come back in as good a shape as anyone. We're working on her slap hitting because he's more consistent that way. She's a very good defensive outfielder who will see time in right and left" Olivieri said. "Lauren is consistent as a batter and can hit with power. She'll see time in the outfield and will give (Messura) a rest behind the plate. Asterita is a speedy outfielder who is very good defensively. A slap hitter who bats to all fields, she is a threat to steal every time she gets on base. Loucks is another solid defensive outfielder who has good power in her bat. Tomizawa and freshman Madison Snyder (Medford, NY/Patchogue-Medford) are utility players who could see time in the infield and outfield. Tomizawa served primarily as a pinch-runner in 2007, stealing a pair of bases and scoring 12 runs, and was solid in the field while seeing time at second base and center field. Snyder is a line-drive hitter and a steady defensive player who is one of the team's best athletes. She played shortstop in high school, but can also play third and the outfield. Also contributing as a utility player will be freshman Erika Huyck (Forestville, NY/Forestville). A speedy player, Huyck will provide depth at catcher and in the outfield while seeing time as a pinch runner. Olivieri has no doubt his team will be able to score runs. His concern is with pitching, but with the improvements Seidewand and Hemenway have made thus far, and a continually improving defense behind them, he's confident the team will be solid in all phases of the game. Alfred is determined to erase the disappointment that came with missing the Empire 8 tournament. The Lady Saxons needed only one win in a doubleheader against visiting Utica but lost a lead late in the opener before dropping the nightcap. Olivieri was pleased with how the team responded, playing well at the end of the year, especially in the ECAC tournament. "I think the youth and inexperience had something to do with" missing out on the conference championships. "But the important thing is they learned from it. They didn't like the feeling of that disappointment and it showed in the way they bounced back. They really matured," Olivieri said. "They came back this year and I could see the confidence and determination. They're ready to build on what they accomplished last season."